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FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 7828
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5076
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2308
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2417
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3369
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4473
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4948
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9536
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 000679

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [BL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: A MIXED RECEPTION FOR CHAVEZ IN BOLIVIA

REF: A. LA PAZ 3302 (2006)
[1](#)B. LA PAZ 673

Classified By: DCM Kris Urs for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez visited Bolivia March 10-11 to show solidarity with Bolivia's flooding victims. In the Beni department on March 10 before a trucked-in crowd of several thousand Bolivians, Chavez donated disaster assistance, including two helicopters and 40 tractors, and used the opportunity to rant against U.S. imperialism. While many flooding victims applauded Chavez' assistance, he also drew criticism, most notably from the opposition mayor and prefect from the area, both who did not participate in the visit. In El Alto March 11, Chavez and Morales signed four agreements on political, commercial, and energy integration. Morales and Chavez spoke to approximately 2,500 social sector members, with Chavez focusing on South American unity and antipathy towards the United States. He called President Bush a "political cadaver" and claimed the CIA and U.S. embassies in the region are working to kill him and Morales and to foment coups in Latin America. Morales, in comparison, was more cautious in his discourse, making only a couple of references to the "empire" or "external enemies." Most daily papers carried the Chavez visit as a second or third page story; Sunday's paper, however, contained a 12-page GOB-paid insert touting the benefits of a tripartite People's Trade Agreement, Cuban literacy programs, and Cuban and Venezuelan disaster assistance. All in all, Chavez' reception in Bolivia was mixed and Morales' tone was cautious, making this visit less notable than previous Chavez forays to Bolivia. End summary.

CHAVEZ BUYING SUPPORT IN THE BENI

[1](#)2. (SBU) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez visited Bolivia March 10-11 to show solidarity with Bolivia's flooding victims. Chavez brought disaster assistance to the Beni department March 10, and used the opportunity to rant against

U.S. imperialism. A trucked-in crowd of several thousand people waving the wiphala (Bolivia's indigenous flag) and the flags of Bolivia, Argentina, Ecuador, and Venezuela met Chavez at the airport. The Venezuelan president donated two helicopters, 40 tractors (via Iranian cooperation), and supplies, as well as 5 million bolivianos (around USD 625,000) for post-disaster reconstruction. In a speech described by the press as overtly political, Chavez said "those who want to go to hell, go for capitalism; those who want to build the kingdom of God here on earth, let's follow socialism." He said that the Morales government and the people of Latin America should fight against the "traitors" that gave Bolivia's natural resources to multinationals in the past. The Venezuelan president said neoliberalism and imperialism fall "like a thousand hurricanes, like a thousand floods" on Bolivia and the region. "The revolution is multiplying," he said, "and that's what the empire fears." He called President Bush's plan to send doctors to the region "ridiculous" given the Venezuelan and Cuban medical aid to date. Chavez also suggested the creation of a South American armed forces. Cuban Popular Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon highlighted his country's assistance in the form of doctors.

13. (SBU) While many flooding victims applauded Chavez' assistance, he also drew criticism from the political opposition and local government officials. In his speech, Chavez referred to Bolivia's "internal enemy," stating that some media outlets and "oligarchs" oppose him and Venezuela's "supposed political interference." The opposition responded publicly, asking Morales to put an end to Chavez' interference. Neither the prefect (governor) of Beni nor the mayor of Trinidad attended the donation ceremony. Prefect Ernesto Suarez said he was not invited and cited Venezuelan military officials' "abuse" of local government officials and civic leaders. Suarez also declared Chavez "persona non grata" and said that while his department is grateful for the help, "we won't lose our dignity." Several mayors from Beni rejected the tractors because they were donated by Venezuela.

LESS THAN A WARM EMBRACE FROM EL ALTO

14. (SBU) In El Alto, Chavez and Morales signed four agreements March 11 on political, commercial, and energy integration. One provided that Bolivia will join Banco del Sur, an initiative started by Venezuela and Argentina that Ecuador and Brazil may also join. Another provided for Bolivia's inclusion in Opegasur (Organization of Southern Countries Producing and Exporting Gas); yet another promised to further the implementation of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) and an April 2006 People's Trade Agreement (TCP) with Venezuela and Cuba (ref A). The final agreement scheduled a regional summit of presidents and social movements to be held in Cochabamba June 4.

15. (SBU) Morales and Chavez spoke to approximately 2,500 social sector members in El Alto; representatives from Venezuela, Cuban, and Ecuador were in attendance. Chavez spoke for more than an hour, focusing on South American unity and antipathy towards the United States. He called President Bush a "political cadaver" and claimed the CIA and U.S. embassies in the region are working to kill him and Morales and to foment coups in Latin America. Chavez criticized the capitalist and neoliberal model, calling countries aligned with Bush oligarchies. He also accused U.S. officials of buying Bolivian military officials for the ultimate defense of the United States. With respect to U.S. assistance and President Bush's Latin American tour, Chavez said "it seems the United States has just discovered that there are poor people in Latin America" and that the region doesn't need its "false charity." Chavez bragged that Caracas, La Paz, and Buenos Aires are the "central axis" of South American integration. Chavez also threw in a few gratuitous "Gringos, go home" comments and expressed homage to Fidel Castro, mispronouncing the indigenous cheer of "jallala a Fidel" ("long live Fidel" in Aymara).

¶16. (SBU) Morales, in comparison, was cautious in his discourse, making only a couple of references to the "empire" or to "external enemies." Regarding President Bush's Latin American tour, Morales noted that Bush has been met by protests and urged Bolivians to unite with the rest of their Latin American homeland. He said that we will see "many Cubas" in the future and described Chavez and Castro as the "two commanders of liberating forces." Morales said his term in office has not been easy because "internal and external enemies want to marginalize us, sometimes use us." He lamented the difficulty in "liberating" people from the neoliberal and capitalist model and highlighted the June summit as an opportunity to unite "governments identified with their people and not the empire." Morales also profusely thanked the international community (without naming specific countries) for their disaster assistance. Finally, Morales addressed allegations of corruption within his Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party and called on party loyalists to report those who corruptly obtained positions in his government.

NO PRESS? LET'S BUY THAT, TOO

¶17. (SBU) Most daily papers carried the Chavez visit as a second or third page story. Sunday's paper, however, contained a 12-page insert paid by the GOB touting the benefits of TCP-ALBA, Cuban literacy programs, and Cuban and Venezuelan disaster assistance. The insert reported that via its "Yes I can" literacy campaign, Cuba has donated 30,000 TVs, 30,000 VHS machines, manuals and books, and 127 Cuban teachers to the program. Cuban "experts" claim a total of 342,766 participants to date, with 87,147 of those having graduated. The insert also touted Cuba's and Venezuela's "immediate response" to flooding in Bolivia. The article claimed Venezuela has donated USD 15 million in disaster assistance, including 100 tons of food, medicines, bottled water, tents, water tanks, generators, inflatable boats, and an all-terrain vehicle. It also reported that Cuba sent more than 100 doctors to rural, flooded areas, for a total of 1,800 doctors in country.

COMMENT: A LUKEWARM RECEPTION

¶18. (C) All in all, Chavez' reception in Bolivia was mixed and Morales' tone was cautious, making this visit less notable than previous Chavez forays to Bolivia. Only 2,500 people received Chavez in El Alto-- a very low number for any type of rally there-- and many were annoyed by the fact that Morales and Chavez arrived almost two hours late. Attendees told Emboff that they were bused in by MAS officials and were provided food throughout the day. While Morales took a few jabs at the United States, he and Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera appeared visibly uncomfortable during Chavez' more radical discourses. If not for Venezuela's significant disaster assistance at a time of great Bolivian need, Chavez' visit would have been a near non-event. End comment.
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